

Modal adverbs vs modal adverbial phrases in English and Romance: historical and functional differences.

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In this paper, I discuss Wierzbicka's (2006: 250-256) claim that English epistemic and evidential adverbs with a *-ly* suffix do not have an interactional/intersubjective meaning, whereas the so-called "modal particles" or modal adverbial phrases such as *maybe*, *perhaps* or *of course*, which are the result of a dynamic grammaticalization process, do have such a meaning. The focus of this paper is on the division of labour between paradigmatic innovation from above (written language) and spontaneous innovation, through grammaticalization, from below (spoken language). The above – below dyad will help us account for two parallel semantic changes: (i) the shift from subjective to intersubjective readings and (ii) the opposite shift from intersubjective to subjective readings.

Although Wierzbicka (2006) convincingly shows that the adverbs ending in *-ly* originate in the tradition of the British Enlightenment of the second half of the 17th century, and more particularly in the epistemological pessimism of authors such as John Locke, she seems to adopt a rather static view of subjectivity and intersubjectivity. The proposed paper argues that the fact that in the 17th century the adverbs ending in *-ly* belonged to the high level textual register of philosophical prose and spread via other textual genres in the 18th century does not preclude them from being used intersubjectively in present-day English. In this paper, I show that although subjectivity is the most common meaning of *-ly* adverbs, intersubjectivity understood as reference to common ground or shared knowledge can also be observed, especially in interactional contexts. The adverbs *obviously* and *surely* corroborate this evolution.

In the second part of the paper I deal with the paradigmatic nature of the adverbs in *-ly* and compare it with the paradigm of Romance modal adverbs in *-ment(e)*. Structural differences will be discussed briefly: It will be shown that phonologically speaking the adverbs in *-ment(e)* combine popular (innovation from below) and prestigious features (innovation from above). With regard to the modal meaning, examples from Spanish and French, indicate that, as in English, there is a tension between the paradigm of the adverbs in *-ment(e)* and the newly recruited modal phrases. This tension can be interpreted as two types of semantic change. The original subjectivity of adverbs in *-ment(e)* is being lost in some cases to also express intersubjective meanings, whereas the intersubjectivity conveyed by modal adverbial phrases such as *peut-être* 'maybe', *a lo mejor* 'perhaps' and *al parecer* 'seemingly', undergoes a process of erosion towards new subjective meanings.

The conclusion is that, (i) due to their textual and paradigmatic origin, the *-ly* and *-ment(e)* adverbs witness functional persistence in present day use, that (ii) some of them have overlapping functions with the intersubjectively oriented adverbial phrases, and that (iii) this is the case in different language families, which may suggest a correlation with human sociality.

The analysis is based on both diachronic and synchronic corpora of English, Spanish and French.

Reference:

Wierzbicka, Anna 2006. *English. Meaning and Culture*. Oxford: OUP,